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Iran still gather Soviet data

Loss of Iran won't hurt spying, U.S. say

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Washington—The United States can duplicate intelligence-gathering capabilities lost in Iran and resume the kind of monitoring of Soviet activities formerly done at the Caspian Sea-area sites, a ranking defense official said yesterday.

Loss of the sites during the Iranian revolution provided further ammunition to critics of the impending strategic arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union. They see the loss as further opening possibilities for cheating on the pact's provisions.

The Iranian intelligence setback was "a little dip from which we can recover by the end of the year—adequately," according to the defense official who asked not to be quoted by name.

The official, fully familiar with alternative intelligence-gathering measures now under way, put himself in direct opposition to senators, notably Henry M. Jackson (D., Wash.), who see the Iranian loss as virtually irreparable. The sites near the Caspian Sea had a clear electronic view of major Soviet missiles test grounds.

"Since Iran," Mr. Jackson has contended, "We have lost our ability to verify Soviet adherence to the ban on new types of ballistic missiles that is a central part of the treaty."

The two sides have yet to agree to a definition of what constitutes a new type of missile. This is one of two remaining key issues to be resolved before the so-called SALT-II treaty is completed. The other involves verification of treaty compliance, centering on prohibitions against encoding the data telemetered from missiles during tests.

Such data tells each side a great deal about the power and inner workings of the other's rockets. Encoding the data would violate the treaty's guarantee that each

side can use its own means to check the other's compliance.

President Carter, having made "many mistakes" on the matter before, refused at his press conference yesterday to predict when the treaty will be completed. "A few issues" remain to be resolved, he said, and the question of "where or when" he will meet with Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev awaits that resolution.

The partial ban on new types of missiles, to which Senator Jackson referred, is a centerpiece of the pact because it is a first attempt to limit qualitative improvements in strategic forces. Similarly, the treaty stipulates that the one new type that each side is allowed may carry no more than 10 warheads, and there can be no increase in numbers of warheads carried on existing missiles.

The defense official contended that adherence to these provisions can be verified by U.S. intelligence agencies. Further, he asserted, it will be easier to keep track generally of Soviet forces with a arms agreement than without one. Without a SALT pact, he emphasized, there would be no ban on encoding or camouflage.

Most U.S. intelligence-gathering is done with earth satellites carrying cameras, television and communications devices. They can determine numbers of rockets, warheads and appearance of new types. There is no technological problem in replacing the lost Iranian sites' capabilities for monitoring telemetry and other data, the official said. One airplane being considered for this, it is known, is the old high-flying U-2 spy plane.